

Better Schools Ahead

PUPILS enrolling in Oklahoma public schools this month have an improved opportunity to acquire a quality education.

The era of declining student competency, poor scores in basic educational skills, widespread criticism of textbooks, and lowered standards for graduation may be approaching an end. The theory that more money would solve all school problems hasn't worked, and other changes are being made, many long overdue.

Some needed remedies were enacted by the Legislature. Parents were given legal access to instructional materials used, local school boards were empowered to reject adopted textbooks considered objectionable in their communities, and local boards were authorized to set up standards of conduct and discipline.

Last April the National Commission on Excellence in Education brought forth recommendations for improving education that immediately won favor, and some are being implemented. The commission called for a longer school year, required courses in basic studies, more homework, upgrading of textbooks and high educational standards for teachers, with higher pay for superior instructors.

The Oklahoma City school board has increased the number of credits required for high school graduation and approved other tougher academic requirements. Students must attend class 80 percent of the time, pass three basic subjects and avoid disciplinary problems or

they may not participate in extracurricular activities.

Recently, teachers expressed support for more effective classroom discipline. It can be had if school boards, administrators and parents back up teachers to create favorable learning situations.

Unions traditionally have opposed paying higher rates for superior work or production, so it wasn't surprising that spokesmen for the teachers opposed "merit pay" for "master teachers." When public opinion appeared to favor merit pay rather strongly, both major teacher unions quietly withdrew their objections.

Further advancements in public education are possible. Sen. Don Nickles, Ponca City Republican who is a member of the Senate committee concerned with federal education programs and funding, has scheduled hearings in Oklahoma City, Ardmore, Tulsa and Enid in the next three weeks.

The Oklahoma Legislature is conducting interim studies on more than a dozen public school questions, including textbook quality, incentives for teachers, funding and discipline.

But schools alone cannot do the job that is needed. Good education must begin at home. An Oriental student who has become a scientific whiz in an Oklahoma City high school explained this point.

"Parents depend on schools to teach their children everything," the 17-year-old said, "but schools can't teach motivation. That has to come from the family."